

INTRODUCTION

"ARABS could be swung on an idea as on a cord; for the unpledged allegiance of their minds made them obedient servants. None of them would escape the bond till success had come, and with it responsibility and duty and engagements. Then the idea was gone and the work ended—in ruins. Without a creed they could be taken to the four corners of the world (but not to heaven) by being shown the riches of earth and the pleasures of it; but if on the road, led in this fashion, they met the prophet of an idea, who had nowhere to lay his head and who depended for his food on charity or birds, then they would all leave their wealth for his inspiration. They were incorrigibly children of the idea, feckless and colour-blind, to whom body and spirit were for ever and inevitably opposed. Their mind was strange and dark, full of depressions and exaltations, lacking in rule, but with more of ardour and more fertile in belief than any other in the world. They were a people of starts, for whom the abstract was the strongest motive, the process of infinite courage and variety, and the end nothing. They were as unstable as water, and like water would perhaps finally prevail. Since the dawn of life, in successive waves they had been dashing themselves against the coasts of flesh. Each wave was broken, but, like the sea, wore away ever so little of the granite on which it failed, and some day, ages yet, might roll unchecked over the place where the material world had been, and God would move upon the face of those waters. One such wave (and not the least) I raised and rolled before the breath of an idea, till it reached its crest, and toppled over and fell at Damascus. The wash of that wave, thrown back by the resistance of vested things, will provide the matter of the following wave, when in fullness of time the sea shall be raised once more."

.

The strange and still mysterious figure of T. E. Lawrence has become, if not the best known, certainly one of the most famous in all the small gallery of true heroes of the war. An unimpressive, rather studious, young man of twenty-six, he was

rejected in the opening days of the war as physically unfit for military service. The authorities who rejected him can be forgiven; for not even Lawrence himself had guessed that he added, to the unusual combination of archæologist, philosopher, diplomat and student of military affairs, the genius of a surpassing leader of irregular cavalry. After his failure to enlist, his knowledge of Arabic and the Arabian peoples brought him a commission as a subaltern in the Intelligence Service of the British command at Cairo. For his subsequent single-handed organisation and leadership of the Arab revolt, through two years of bitter and weird adventure, in an atmosphere of incredible romance and under a veil of profound secrecy, the authorities were not to blame. It was his own masterpiece, and it was one of the miracles of the war.

In 1914, T. E. Lawrence was serving as a more or less unnoticed assistant in the British Museum's excavation of Carchemish on the Euphrates. Under the appearance of a brilliant and somewhat eccentric student of archæology, he concealed a lively initiative, a sympathetic understanding of the country, and a relationship to more than one soldier prominent in British history, including—it is supposed—a Sir Robert Lawrence who fought as a crusader under Richard Cœur de Lion. Casual travellers found him unobtrusively digging Hittite remains out of the banks of the Euphrates; he left them reassured by his tactfulness with the Arab labourers as to the future of the British Empire. He knew the Near East intimately. His first direct knowledge of the complicated peoples of Arabia had been gained while he was still an undergraduate at Oxford, when he is said to have undertaken, alone and in native dress, a two-year expedition among the tribes behind Syria, in order to gather material for his thesis on the military history of the Crusades. Such experience placed him, obviously, in the direct line of those remarkable British Orientalists like Doughty and Burton who have done so much to enrich British letters. It could hardly have been anticipated that it was preparing him for the very different and more romantic achievements in reckless leadership and masterful strategy which are described in these pages.

Lawrence was not the author of the revolt; his was the more difficult, and also more dangerous, task of being its inspiration.

A subaltern officer with no respect for his superiors, with a sensitive and vigorous mind, undisturbed either by military regulations or a desire for glory, and with a scholarly taste in reading, he was clearly an unexpected figure among the soldiery and camp followers at Cairo. Since then he has allowed very little to be known of himself. After his triumph in Syria, the famous guerilla leader (who nevertheless remained an ethnological expert) served in the British peace delegation at Versailles, and was later a member of a special commission on Near Eastern affairs headed by the Colonial Secretary. But an almost passionate dislike of notoriety and a seemingly deliberate eccentricity have continued to conceal his character; and he is now [February, 1927] actually serving as a private soldier in the British Army, while the mists of a gathering legend have cloaked him in the obscurity of an almost mythological hero.

However, in 1919, he wrote out in a 400,000-word book the whole bitter account of his adventure and of his disappointment over the conclusion which the Peace Conference seemed to put to it. He left the book, together with some of his notes and many photographs, in a handbag in the Reading railway station; a few minutes later it had disappeared. There was a flurry of rumour to the effect that it had been stolen by high authorities; subsequently it has seemed more likely that the bag was taken by a casual sneak-thief, but Lawrence at any rate sat down with an heroic effort of memory to rewrite the account. He never intended it, however, for publication. He had it printed on a newspaper press in Oxford, in an edition limited characteristically to eight copies, of which three, in what seems almost an excess of reticence, were afterward destroyed.

Of all the honours that an astonished government tried to force upon him, the war-time rank of Lieutenant-Colonel was the only one which he accepted, and that largely because of the necessity for maintaining his status with the Arabs. The latter called him simply "El-Orens," or else by the more picturesque title of "Wrecker of Engines." The titles which the newspapers afterwards invented only annoyed him; and not long ago the astonishing discovery was made that he had enlisted under an assumed name in the Royal Air Force, presumably to avoid attention. There was, of course, another wave of notoriety, and it is

understood that he is now occupying the even less explicable position of a private in the Tank Corps.

The re-written book, with which Lawrence himself was never quite satisfied, was a purely personal record. His impregnable reticence was, however, broken down to the extent of allowing a lengthy abridgment for publication by "a friendly man of letters." The book in its present form opens abruptly with Lawrence's arrival with the Arabian armies, long after he had taken up, along with others of the more brilliant younger men in the intelligence service at Cairo, the enthusiastic advocacy of the Arabian revolt.

At the very outset of the war British diplomacy had remembered the unrest among the Arab-speaking populations of Turkey, and its possible value in the defence of the Suez Canal. A revolutionary movement, fostered both by powerful secret societies and the repressive measures of the Turks, had been growing ever since the Young Turk revolution of 1908. It included many high civil and military officers of the Turkish Government, while a third of the Turkish Army was Arabic-speaking and consequently disaffected. Even before Turkey declared war, Sir Henry McMahon, the representative of British civil power in Egypt, had written to Hussein, the Grand Sherif of Mecca, to promise British support for the independence of the Arabs. The secret societies did not agree that the Allies' cause against the Central Powers was identical with the Arabs' cause against Turkey; many of their members were still loyally commanding Turkish troops at the end of the war, and a doubt among the Arabs as to the disinterestedness of the British explains many of Lawrence's later difficulties. The Arabs, however, did plan a revolution on their own account, under the banner of Hussein and his four sons, but it came to nothing.

Meanwhile Lawrence had taken up his modest duties in the Intelligence Service at Cairo.

"I had been many years," he has said, "going up and down the Semitic East before the war, learning the manners of the villagers and tribesmen and citizens of Syria and Mesopotamia. My poverty had constrained me to mix with the humbler classes, those seldom met by European travellers, and thus my experiences gave me an unusual angle of view, which enabled me to

understand and think for the ignorant many as well as for the more enlightened whose rare opinions mattered, not so much for the day, as for the morrow. In addition I had seen something of the political forces working in the minds of the Middle East, and especially had noted everywhere sure signs of the decay of imperial Turkey."

There were other archæologists, orientalist, and younger experts of the political service, who, although wearing the unfamiliar uniforms of the army and navy, believed in the Arabian revolt as much for the sake of the Arabs as for the sake of the Allies. Lawrence was united with them in their interest in Sir Henry McMahon's correspondence with Hussein, although the more orthodox minds among the military found it difficult to understand such unconventional methods of warfare. As Lawrence adds:

"We called ourselves 'Intrusive' as a band; for we meant to break into the accepted halls of English foreign policy, and build a new people in the East, despite the rails laid down for us by our ancestors. Therefore, from our hybrid Intelligence office in Cairo (a jangling place which for its incessant bells and bustle and running to and fro was likened by Aubrey Herbert to an Oriental railway station) we began to work upon all our chiefs, far and near."

It is a process of which chiefs seldom approve; but Sir Henry continued both his correspondence and his promises. The long agony of the Dardanelles was played out and ended, the British came to disaster at Kut-el-Amara, and the Turks were as close across the Suez Canal as ever. But in the summer of 1916 Sir Henry triumphed, and at the beginning of June Hussein proclaimed the revolt of the Arab people, with British money and support.

Both Jidda and Mecca fell in the first rush of the Sherifian armies, but Feisal's attack upon Medina, the Turkish strong-point at the end of the Hejaz Railway, failed, and the revolt began to go rather precariously astray amid the simplicities of Arab patriotism and the complex departmental and international jealousies at Cairo. The military authorities still seemed incapable of grasping the value of a war started by the civilians; and a staff perturbed by the eccentric brilliancy of an Intelligence

Service made up of experts began to show tendencies toward suppressing them. Sir Henry was recalled to England, and the Sherifian forces, led by Hussein's son Feisal and his three brothers, Ali, Abdulla and Zeid, got neither the supplies nor the advice which they needed.

Lawrence (he was only twenty-eight years old) had never regarded himself as a soldier; he liked his work of making maps and running a secret Arab newspaper, and he felt it meanness in him to pretend to be a man of action. Yet his Arab revolt was in serious difficulties. The Turks had sent out a formal attacking column from Medina, and the Arab levies were in danger of being jammed—by the inapplicable principles of orthodox war—into the area around Mecca, instead of using their dash and mobility in the irregular combat for which they were supremely fitted. Meanwhile Lawrence found himself in danger of being politely eliminated, as an upstart, while other men ruined the plans for which he was largely responsible.

His reply was, first to make himself as obnoxious as possible to his military superiors, and then to ask for leave. It was granted with alacrity, in the hope that he could be gently put out of the way on his return. But he did not intend to be put out of the way. He boarded a naval vessel on the way down the Red Sea, ostensibly as a "joy-ride" with Sir Ronald Storrs, another of the "Intrusives," who was making an official trip to Jidda. He was without authority or passes, and Feisal, the principal commander, was in the interior, from which as a Christian he was debarred by order. But it was his precocious intention to see what he, a staff-captain on leave, could do for the confused armies of Arabia.

"Storrs and I then marched off together, happily. In the East they swore that by three sides was the decent way across a square; and my trick to escape was in this sense oriental. But I justified myself by my confidence in the final success of the Arab revolt if properly advised. I had been a mover in its beginning; my hopes lay in it. The fatalistic subordination of a professional soldier (intrigue being unknown in the British army) would have made a proper officer sit down and watch his plan of campaign wrecked by men who thought nothing of it, and to whose spirit it made no appeal. Non nobis, Domine."

.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	v
PUBLISHER'S NOTE	xv
FOREWORD	xvii
I STORRS GOES TO JIDDAH	i
II RIDING UP TO FEISAL	8
III FEISAL AND HIS LEVIES	20
IV CHECKS AROUND YENBO	30
V FEISAL STRIKES NORTH	41
VI TACTICS AND POLITICS	55
VII SETTING OUT FOR SYRIA	68
VIII THE VERITABLE DESERT	77
IX FEASTS OF THE TRIBES	86
X NOMADS AND NOMAD LIFE	96
XI FIGHTING TO THE SEA	107
XII AKABA, SUEZ, ALLENBY	117
XIII REFORMING OURSELVES	123
XIV PRICKING THE ENEMY	128
XV MINES IN THE RAILWAY	137
XVI VICTORY AND LOOT	143
XVII MAKING UP OUR MINDS	152
XVIII ACROSS THE LINE AGAIN	157
XIX SERVICES AND SERMONS	164
XX RACING TO THE BRIDGE	172
XXI TO CATCH A TRAIN	181
XXII RETURN TO THE WORLD	189

XXIII	FIGHTING FOR TAFILEH	198
XXIV	WINTER SHUTS US DOWN	210
XXV	THE SIEGE OF MAAN	223
XXVI	DAWNAY ATTACKS SHAHM	232
XXVII	TRANSPORT AND SUPPLY	237
XXVIII	BUXTON AND THE I.C.C.	246
XXIX	WASHING OUR LINEN	259
XXX	IN THE ADVANCE GUARD	263
XXXI	WE CUT THE MAIN LINES	274
XXXII	FIGHTING UP AND DOWN	285
XXXIII	ROYAL AIR FORCE HELP	291
XXXIV	THE TURKS CRUMPLE UP	300
XXXV	JOINING THE BRITISH	312
XXXVI	ENTRY INTO DAMASCUS	319
XXXVII	JERRY-CABINET-MAKING	324
	INDEX	329
	SKETCH MAP	336

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	FACING PAGE
T. E. LAWRENCE	<i>Frontispiece</i>
<i>After a portrait by</i> AUGUSTUS JOHN	
SIR A. H. MCMAHON	12
(High Commissioner in Egypt)	
<i>After a portrait by</i> W. ROBERTS	
SIR RONALD STORRS	28
(Governor of Jerusalem, Governor of Cyprus)	
<i>After a portrait by</i> ERIC KENNINGTON	
REAR-ADMIRAL W. E. D. BOYLE	44
(S.N.O., Red Sea)	
<i>After a portrait by</i> ERIC KENNINGTON	
COLONEL C. E. WILSON	76
(H.M. Diplomatic Agent, Jidda)	
<i>From a portrait by</i> ERIC KENNINGTON	
D. G. HOGARTH	92
<i>From a portrait by</i> AUGUSTUS JOHN	
EMIR SHAKIR	108
<i>From a portrait by</i> ERIC KENNINGTON	
COLONEL S. F. NEWCOMBE, R. E.	124
<i>From a portrait by</i> W. ROBERTS	
GENERAL SIR REGINALD WINGATE	156
(Sirdar and High Commissioner in Egypt)	
<i>From a portrait by</i> W. ROBERTS	
STOKES GUN CLASS AT AKABA	172
<i>From a drawing by</i> COSMO CLARK	
LORD LLOYD	204
(High Commissioner in Egypt)	
<i>From a portrait by</i> W. ROBERTS	

xiv LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	FACING PAGE
ABDULLA EL ZAAGI (Captain of the author's bodyguard) <i>From a portrait by</i> ERIC KENNINGTON	220
SERJ EL ATEIBI <i>From a portrait by</i> ERIC KENNINGTON	252
JAAFAR PASHA (C.-in-C. Arab Northern Army, later Prime Minister, Irak) <i>From a portrait by</i> ERIC KENNINGTON	268
H.M. KING FEISAL OF IRAK <i>From a portrait by</i> AUGUSTUS JOHN	300
BOMBING THE TURKISH RETREAT IN WADI FARA (Reproduced by permission of the Imperial War Museum) <i>From a painting by</i> S. CARLINE	316

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

It seems necessary to explain that the spelling of Arabic names throughout this book varies according to the whim of the author.

The publisher's proof-reader objected strongly to the apparent inconsistencies which he found, and a long and entertaining correspondence ensued between author and publisher. The author's attitude can best be judged from the following extracts which show questions and answers in parallel columns.

Q.

I attach a list of queries raised by F. who is reading the proofs. He finds these very clean, but full of inconsistencies in the spelling of proper names, a point which reviewers often take up. Will you annotate it in the margin, so that I can get the proofs straightened?

A.

Annotated: not very helpfully perhaps. Arabic names won't go into English, exactly, for their consonants are not the same as ours, and their vowels, like ours, vary from district to district. There are some 'scientific systems' of transliteration, helpful to people who know enough Arabic not to need helping, but a wash-out for the world. I spell my names anyhow, to show what rot the systems are.

Slip 1. Jeddah and Jidda used impartially throughout. Intentional?

Rather!

Slip 16. Bir Waheida, was Bir Waheidi.

Why not? All one place.